LOCAL PEACEBUILDING APPROACHES

EVALUATION REPORT

2011

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DISCLAIMER:

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ACRONYMS

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
APM	All Party Mechanism
CA	Constituent Assembly
CCDC	Center for Community Development and Change
CDF	Community Development Forum
CEDPA	Center for Development and Population Activities
CeLRRDe	Center for Legal Research and Resource Development
CF	Community Facilitator
CLRC	Community Legal Research Center
CM	Community Mediation
CMEP	Community Mediation Extension Project
CMM	Conflict Mitigation and Management
CMP	Community Mediation Program
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSP	Community Service Project
DAG	Disadvantaged Groups
DDC	District Development Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
DIDC	District Information and Documentation Center of DDC
DG	Democracy and Governance
DTO	District Technical Office
EIG	Education for Income Generation
ESP	Enabling State Program
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GON	Government of Nepal
HURDEC	Human Resource Development Centre
HUCODAN	Human Rights and Community Development Academy (HUCODAN)
INGO	International Nongovernmental Organization
KII	Key Informant Interview
LDO	Local Development Officer
LG	Local Government
LPBP	Local Peacebuilding Program
LPBA	Local Peacebuilding Approach
LPC	Local Peace Committees
LSGA	Nepal Local Self Governance Act
LPO	Local Partner Organization
LSP	Local Service Provider

MCDC	Mahuli Community Development Center
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoLD	Ministry of Local Development
MoPR	Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTCP	Madhesh Terai Community (Mediation) Project
NBS	Nari Bikas Sangh (an NGO)
NGCPP	Nepal Government Citizen Partnership Project
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NPR	Nepalese Rupees
NTI	Nepal Transition Initiative
NW	New World
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
PBA	Peacebuilding Approach
PESOC	Shanti Samaj Kendra
PMC	Project Management Committee
PRDC	Panchawati Rural Development Center
PSA	Public Service Announcement
RUPREDUS	Rural Poverty Reduction and Dalit Upliftment Society
SCDC	Saptari Community Development Center
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SIDC	Society Improvement Development Centre
SIRDC	Sky Integrated Rural Development Center
SM	Social Mobilizer
SOW	Statement of Work
STS	Save the Saptari
TA	Technical Assistance
TMC	Traditionally Marginalized Community
UPCN(M)	United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
USG	United States Government
VAW	Violence Against Women
VCF	Village Citizen Forum
VDC	Village Development Committee
WCF	Ward Citizen Forum
WEL	Water Environment and Livelihoods
WN	Women Network
WOREC	Women's Rehabilitation Center
YAN	Youth Action Nepal
YMC	Youth Mobilization Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of approaches to peacebuilding at the local level as applied by peacebuilding programs implemented in Nepal. These approaches are those that support sustainable peace by specifically addressing three key drivers of conflict identified by USAID/Nepal, namely, social exclusion; inequalities in the distribution of resources; lack of economic opportunity; and, inadequate systems for addressing local conflict.

This evaluation is carried out by a 5-member team from Scott Wilson Nepal, a Nepali consultancy organization. Field assessment was carried out in18 selected VDCs of three districts (Saptari, Udayapur and Morang). In addition to the core team, six local enumerators were engaged to carry out the questionnaire survey. Interviews were conducted among key informants from VDCs, DDCs, local partner and non-partner non-government organizations (e.g., YMCs, SMs, WN, APM, Media, YN) working on peacebuilding programs. In addition, the team had extensive discussions with beneficiary communities and visited infrastructure sites. A package of methods was developed for the evaluation, which included quantitative and qualitative questionnaire, checklists, Approach Assessment Sheets and case studies.

LOCAL PEACEBUILDING APPROACHES

'Approach', in the context of this evaluation, is defined as the conceptual paths adopted by the programs to realize a set of outcomes through the use of program activities. The outcomes then collectively help realize a broader goal, local peacebuilding in this case. The study identified seven local peacebuilding approaches that formed the basis for the evaluation. The approaches and the hypotheses underlying their contribution to peacebuilding are as follows.

Approach 1: Youth for community stabilization and peace

The engagement of youth in community stabilization through capacity enhancement will increase civic awareness and participation in local planning processes. Potential conflicts at the local level can be significantly minimized by youth-focused awareness raising activities, media engagement and youth driven activities that would purposefully engage local youth for limited but critical periods.

Approach 2: Capacity enhancement of local fora and networks

Effective, inclusive and equitable participation of the people in local planning process, particularly when it is led by capacitated local fora and networks, can result in a community that is confident and forward looking.

Approach 3: Local dispute resolution through mediation centers

Local mediation process owned by local institutions can effectively reduce local level disputes and contribute to community stabilization.

Approach 4: Capacity enhancement of local government institutions

Swift and quality provision of services by local government institutions can contribute to building confidence of the people in their institutions.

Approach 5: Engage community to meet local infrastructure needs

Intensive external support to meet local infrastructure needs can effectively contribute to engage the local population in constructive purposes while raising their confidence and instilling a sense of recognition among the people.

Approach 6: Empowering women to access their human rights

Potential conflict at the local level can be substantially reduced through support and awareness raising activities among women, particularly those who have been subjected to violence, in accessing their human rights, justice and to rehabilitate them.

Approach 7: Improved economic opportunities

Increased economic opportunities, through support for local agriculture production and skill development, can provide incentives for community members, particularly the youth and the excluded members, to remain within the communities and contribute to local governance processes and development activities.

FINDINGS

A. Social inclusion and practices in distribution of resources

Social exclusion results in inequality in the distribution of opportunities and resources. The local peacebuilding approaches have been designed to increase the access of women and marginalized groups to community resources through increased awareness and empowerment. Youth and citizen based groups such as Youth Mobilization Committees (YMC), Ward Citizen Forum (WCF), Village Citizen Forum (VCF) etc were constituted by the LPB programs, and trainings were provided to strengthen their capacity to organize, communicate and lead local planning and development processes.

These organizations were found to be active and reached out to the communities in organizing resources for small infrastructure development, holding youth camps on peace and constitution writing and in maintaining social harmony. They also visited communities and households to understand their development priorities and assess resource needs and prioritize them before approaching the VDC Councils for its approval for resource allocation.

However, soon after the completion of the programs, these organizations began to weaken. The youth members started to leave their villages in search of economic opportunities. Those who remained or were added have continued but weakly in the absence of any formal recognition by the VDC or by the local political leadership. The motivation and support needed to penetrate deeper to reach out to the marginalized and poor communities was lacking, and consequently the participation of these groups in decision making for the resources was not effective. While some organized and empowered women groups have secured their share of resources, the overall distribution of resources is highly inequitable. There is growing awareness among the deprived and poor communities that they need to have stronger role in the local governments and that resources should flow more to them, but their own capacity to organize and to assert their role limits them in achieving this objective.

B. Availability of economic opportunities at local level

The local peacebuilding programs reviewed by the team in the districts visited (i.e. Saptari, Udayapur and Morang) did not have activity components to directly support creation of economic opportunities for the local population. This usually means, in the local context, provision of vocations skills, financial or material support to youths to establish employment intensive enterprises or agricultural development programs etc. The peacebuilding programs which supported these activities, such as NFRP and EIG, were not implemented in the visited districts. However, intensive infrastructure development support in Morang as well as to a lesser extent in Saptari and Udayapur were providing short term employment to local population.

The team found the local youths feeling very strongly that economic opportunities were severely lacking. This was reflected by absence of many youths that were originally in the youth organizations.

C. Strengthening systems, tools and skills for addressing local conflicts

The local peacebuilding programs have developed a number of systems and tools and provided necessary skills to the community representatives to use them. These systems and tools have been designed to minimize conflicts at local level by resolving disputes of local nature through local initiatives (such as local Mediation Centers, MC) or by creating wider awareness through use of different communication media, such as FM Radio broadcasts, public hearing sessions and provision of display boards to disseminate information on Citizen Charters and community prioritized projects.

The evaluation team found that Mediation Centers (MCs) have been particularly popular and useful in reaching out to common people. Majority of local disputes were found to be of localized nature, such a neighbor's goat eating grass or crop of another household or small land forcibly occupied by a neighbor/relative. MCs were a big relief for a family for whom this small but thorny injustice can be addressed locally and fairly with reduced prospect for this being flared up at a community level.

Public hearings, hoarding boards and brochures and posters were widely supported to disseminate information on the roles and responsibilities of local governments and the people. The outcomes of the local planning processes, particularly the schemes identified and prioritized by the community meetings, were displayed at key locations.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 1: Strengthening of community based organizations (e.g. YMC/ VCF/ WCF) and their undertaking of community needs assessment has helped to better understand the community priorities and feed this to the Village Council meetings.

Conclusion 2: The ability and approach of the peacebuilding programs to reach out to weaker segments of the community is weak. The awareness raising programs have not succeeded in reaching out to disadvantaged and vulnerable communities in the same intensity as non-disadvantaged groups.

Conclusion 3: These communities, particularly the *dalits*, are still ignorant about the services, resources and facilities available at the local level and ways to access these services. There is no discernible and long term change in the way decisions are made locally with visible participation of the traditionally marginalized groups. As a result, inequality in opportunities and resource sharing is still widespread in the study areas.

Conclusion 4: Local youth participation and activism is more pronounced and stable when they are already employed or have a locally based profession.

Conclusion 5: The linkages between local youth/citizen fora and the local government institutions (DDC and VDC) are weak due to absence of formal linkages of the programs with VDC/DDC institutions. As a result, local government institutions and political leadership have not recognized these institutions for long term support.

Conclusion 6: Increased use of community based tools such as in public hearing/ public audit, local FM Radios, display boards with Citizen Charters of VDC etc has increased community preparedness and confidence over VDC institutions resulting in increased use of their services.

Conclusion 7: Mediation centers have been successful in resolving local disputes by building consensus among the disputing parties. This tool particularly stands out as having direct and visible impact at the local level.

Conclusion 8: More awareness and increased youth activism at the local level have created pressure at the VDC level for the VDC institutions to perform better and for local political leaders to listen to the youth and marginalized communities. However, the community members, particularly the youth are still limited in their engagement on local government activities due to poor economic opportunities at local level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Programs design need to be more intensive and committed in order to penetrate into the poor and Madhesi Dalits communities. These programs should include activities to support members of these communities in income generation as a priority.

- Employment, income generation or skill development training programs need to be provided to youths so that incentive to stay on and explore work in their own villages while motivating them to engage in local government supported development activities.

- Partnership with local government, other program partners and communities should be established and strengthened from the initial stage of program planning for swift and quality provision of services and to develop ownership of the outputs by local government institutions and local political leadership.

- There is need to have a third party program monitoring at the central level, DDC and VDC levels, in order to review the progress and impacts on stakeholders accountability, development of ownership and to assess the effectiveness of NGOs services.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1   BACKGROUND

Nepal entered a new chapter in its political history with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) in November 2006. The CPA ended over a decade of conflict between the Maoist rebels (the Unified Communist Party of Nepal – Maoists (UCPN-M)) and the then Government of Nepal (GON) that resulted in the loss of some 14,000 people. Following the CPA, USAID/Nepal embarked on a series of programs aimed at contributing to prevent conflict, fostering resilience and building peace at the community level. These have included, among others, the recently completed Nepal Transition Initiative (NTI) and the Nepal Government Citizen Partnership Project (NGCPP). Two additional peacebuilding programs (Nepal Flood Recovery Program, NFRP and the Education for Income Generation, EIG), both funded by USAID, also have local peacebuilding objectives. During the course of the field visits, two non-USAID funded programs, the DFID funded Madhesh Terai Community (Mediation) Project (MTCP) and Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), were also visited and have been briefly assessed at the field level. These and other peacebuilding programs funded by USAID/Nepal or other donors are collectively referred to hereinafter as the 'peacebuilding programs'.

The underlying approach as reflected in most peacebuilding programs is "to strengthen the linkages between communities and local governments and to support community initiatives for peaceful coexistence"[1]. This builds on the premise that "if communities work together, inclusive of all their participants, and have mechanisms for working and communicating with local government institutions, then they will have the tools to resolve grievances peacefully and will be more resistant to drivers of conflict"[2].

This Study is about the evaluation of general approaches used by various peacebuilding programs in Nepal for local peacebuilding. The approaches extracted and articulated in Chapter 3 are the works of the evaluators. The assessments and evaluations of these approaches are therefore not specific to one program nor reflect the performance of any individual program.

Brief introduction of the peacebuilding programs which were referred to during the study process are given in Annex K.

1.2   PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of this assessment is to *evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of approaches to peacebuilding at the local level*. These approaches are those that support sustainable peace by specifically addressing three key drivers of conflict identified by USAID/Nepal[3]. Namely

- Social exclusion, inequalities in the distribution of resources
- Lack of economic opportunity

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[1] USAID/Nepal, Scope of Work (SOW), Evaluation of USAID/Nepal Local Peacebuilding Approaches, 2011
[2] Ibid
[3] ibid

- Inadequate systems for addressing local conflict.

The evaluation process aims to inform peacebuilding and local governance programs, irrespective of USAID/Nepal support. In this way, the evaluation considers a broader perspective of peacebuilding processes at local level and looks forward to learning from different experiences in Nepal on how these processes have delivered the intended results.

In undertaking the evaluation process, the study seeks to respond to three evaluation questions.[4]

1. What changes have occurred in how development decisions are made and resources managed at the community level reflecting the participation and input of women, youth, and traditionally marginalized communities?
2. How have community members' feelings about government and their own role in local government processes changed?
3. What skills and tools have communities developed for working and communicating among themselves and with local government?

1.3   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In view of the time available for the study, the team limited its visit to 18 VDCs out of 133 VDCs covered by the peacebuilding programs in three districts – Saptari (77) Udayapur (44) and Morang (12) and met with a sample of communities, VDC secretaries, YMCs, APM, and other stakeholders including I/NGOs engaged in peacebuilding programs implemented in these 3 districts.

As the evaluation process was carried out during the peak farming season, the number of focus group discussion (FGD) participants were fewer than expected and the team, in some cases, had to take extra effort in meeting or organizing consultative activities with the community members.

Similarly, there is always a language and security barrier while working in an area such as in Saptari and Morang Districts, which is culturally and ethnically diverse and is known to have some active unidentified armed groups. The team had one expert from the region who could speak the local language and hence interviews were limited to the proximity of this member.

Additionally, as the evaluation took place at the beginning of new Fiscal Year, it was difficult to find LDOs in their offices. Morang and Udaipur had new LDOs that were recently transferred and in Saptari the LDO was absent while a number of VDC secretaries were also transferred from one VDC to another within the districts. VDC Secretaries were also organizing a countrywide agitation by closing their offices when the team was in Morang. The team had to limit its VDC visits to five though more VDCs were targeted for visits.

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[4] ibid

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY FOR EVALUATING LOCAL PEACEBUILDING APPROACHES

2.1   EVALUATION METHODS

The evaluation methodology developed relied on multiple investigation methods to capture, as fully as possible, the various facets of local peacebuilding applied in the programs. They comprise the following:

Customized checklists were prepared for each interview category (e.g. local government key person interviews, social mobilizers, youth mobilization committees, CBOs/NGOs, beneficiaries, community mediators. (See Annex C for complete list). The checklists cover the key drivers of conflict such as social exclusion, inequalities in the distribution of the resources, lack of economic opportunity and inadequate systems for addressing local conflicts. The peacebuilding programs were designed to address these key drivers of conflict in view of the social structure, economic disparity, fewer opportunities for common people to influence decisions making process etc. To this end, the evaluation process closely explores in which ways the peacebuilding approaches addressed the key drivers of conflict at local level.

The key evaluation tool comprised a set of **Approach Assessment Sheets** (Annex D) that were developed for each of the local peacebuilding approaches identified by the evaluation team. In all, seven different approaches were identified which were to enhance peacebuilding at local level. Of these, five approaches are analyzed using a combination of field level interactions, meetings, workshops and informal discussions carried out with a range of stakeholders during the field visits to Saptari, Udayapur and Morang. In addition, the peacebuilding approaches of two non-USAID funded programs have also been briefly combined into one approach and assessed at the field level. The approaches of two additional USAID peacebuilding programs are combined into one and have also been reviewed through a document analysis but not evaluated at the field level.

The evaluation process is guided by a set of **Indicators** developed by the team for key activities covering the areas of local governance, youth mobilizations, local mediation processes and general awareness on peace, constitution making and election processes. The analysis is then carried out using these indicators to assess the performance of these approaches. The matrix of indicators used for review purposes is given in Annex E.

A **survey questionnaire** (see Annex I) was developed and field survey carried out to assess the application of the approaches and generate information on issues covered by the evaluation questions.

Finally, brief **case studies** in the form of 'Voices from the people' are provided from a cross section of interviews carried out (see Annex H).

The narrative description of local peacebuilding approaches as well as brief observations of their applications is given in Chapter 3**.**

2.2 SELECTION OF VISIT AREAS AND BENEFICIARY GROUPS

The VDCs, activity locations, outputs, and the stakeholders that were selected for evaluation purposes were independently identified by the evaluation team during the planning phase of the evaluation. The team consulted concerned DDC authorities for confirmation of the geographical location and accessibility of the identified VDCs before it was finalized. Some minor changes were made after consultation and VDCs list for the visit was finalized.

The following criteria were considered while selecting VDCs for field observations;

- VDCs covering maximum activities that address the critical drivers of conflict
- VDCs experiencing increased conflict
- VDCs having high settlement of Traditionally Marginalized Populations
- VDCs having other agencies engaged in peacebuilding process
- Geographical accessibility

Accordingly, the evaluation team visited 18 VDCs of the three districts identified in the SOW for field visits.

2.3 STAGES OF EVALUATION

The evaluation process comprised four key activities:

a. Literature review and central level consultations

The team met with key implementing agency partners to obtain insight into implementation issues and progress levels. These included Chemonics, SFCG, CEDPA, HURDEC, Pro-Public, Youth Action Nepal and ADB program staff. The team also extensively reviewed the progress reports, evaluation reports, and other background literature made available to the team by key stakeholders on peacebuilding approaches.

The documents reviewed are provided in the Bibliography and persons met are listed in the Supplementary Document at the end of this report.

b. Field work: Field visits to mediation centers, infrastructures, DDC, VDC institutions and communities.

The evaluation team covered 6 out of 77 program VDCs of Saptari District, 7 out of 44 program VDCs of Udayapur and 6 out of 12 program VDCs of Morang districts. The Annex B gives the list of the districts and VDCs visited by the team and summarizes various consultations it carried out with the community members.

c. Interactions with stakeholders (APM, YMC, PMC, WCF, VDC, DDC authorities) beneficiary and implementing partner organizations

This was an important tool for the evaluation team. The interactions with different stakeholders at the field level provided in-depth knowledge on the status of the programs and the approaches adopted by them, particularly after the phasing out of activities.

The following tools were extensively used as investigation techniques:

- Focus Group Discussions (FGD)
- Key Informant Interviews (KII)
- Formal meetings
- Informal/casual interactions
- Site-based observations

The discussion partners were drawn around program components, and sought to include as far as possible representatives from diverse ethnic and marginalized groups. During these sessions, the evaluation team ensured that ample time was provided for in-depth discussion and analysis. Where necessary, separate sessions were organized with women and participants from minority groups to discuss sensitive issues.

d. *Sample Survey*

A sample survey was carried out to assess the outcomes of peace process from beneficiaries' perspectives. Independent local youth were hired as enumerators for carrying out the survey. The enumerators were given a short orientation on collecting information using the questionnaire designed by the team (see Annex I). The survey was conducted in 19 VDCs covering 264 informants. The key findings of the survey are given in Annex J.

CHAPTER 3: IDENTIFICATION OF LOCAL PEACEBUILDING APPROACHES

3.1   CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF 'APPROACHES'

Approach in common parlance is used to express how certain activities are carried out. From a broader developmental perspective, approaches denote specific ways to carry out developmental activities to reach out to the intended targets. For example, planning activities follow *bottom-up approach*; construction activities are carried out using *environmental friendly approach* and evaluation processes use *consultative approach* to reflect the views of wide ranging stakeholders.

Peacebuilding programs follow a similar set of approaches. Peacebuilding approaches at local level follow a highly *participatory approach*, meaning that they engage with a large number of people of different groups to design and implement programs. Similarly, they usually have an *approach* to work with poor, marginalized and vulnerable group of people. They also share a common *approach to work with youth groups and support them to engage in constructive activities.*

Understandably, there is no problem with any of the above approaches mentioned above. These are universally accepted practices which are used as appropriate to the given circumstances.

The *approaches* that are under review in this evaluation study are therefore those that are actually used to achieve a more defined objective (or outcome) at local level but would feed to a broader peacebuilding goal (or impact) at a higher level (local, regional or national).

'Approach', in the context of this evaluation is, therefore, defined as the conceptual paths adopted by the programs to realize a set of outcomes through the use of program activities. The outcomes then collectively help realize a broader goal, local peacebuilding in this case.

3.2   LOCAL PEACEBUILDING APPROACHES USED BY LOCAL PEACEBUILDING PROGRAMS

This study has identified seven local peacebuilding approaches used by the peacebuilding programs in their efforts to "strengthen linkages between communities and local governments and to support community initiatives for peaceful coexistence."[5] As elaborated in the Introduction (Chapter 1), these approaches have been developed with the assumption that strategic community-led initiatives could have an impact on addressing the critical drivers of conflict, namely, social exclusion; inequalities in the distribution of resources; lack of economic opportunity; and inadequate systems for addressing local conflict.

In evaluating the peacebuilding approaches, the team has considered how these approaches are applied at the field level and what results have been realized. This will show how effective these approaches have been at the field level and in the given implementation environment. Understandably, one approach which might perfectly work in predominantly Terai region (such as Saptari) may not exactly deliver the

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[5] USAID/ Nepal SOW 2011

same results in a hill-Terai mixed community such as Udayapur. Similarly, the quality of local NGOs, existing awareness among the communities, particularly the youths etc, also impact the results in many ways. The evaluation process has therefore taken these factors into consideration during the study process.

Implementation approach of the peacebuilding programs

The way the peacebuilding programs are implemented have clearly impacted the outcome from the approaches these programs have used. One implementation approach that is common to all programs is that they are implemented as direct interventions by the funding agency with loose coordination with central (i.e. Ministry level) and local level government institutions (mainly the DDCs). In doing so, these programs have achieved rapid mobilization of resources and quick impact in stabilizing a conflict-prone setting. However, the local government institutions, particularly the DDC, and local leadership at the district level have not always owned the institutions and the outputs of these programs. Consequently, some of the results from the peacebuilding programs have not sustained due to lack of funds and recognition at the local government level.

Similarly, with due consideration to a number of factors affecting results, the programs have adopted an implementation modality that ensures minimum cash is involved in providing inputs to the communities and more of 'in-kind' support by way of materials and services (e.g., trainers and resource persons) goes to partner organizations (e.g., NGOs/YMC/DDC/VDC). This has proved to be a well thought-through approach and has supported delivery of transparent, timely and quality output. This implementation modality has been appreciated by the stakeholders.

The seven local peacebuilding approaches and the hypotheses underlying their contribution to peacebuilding are as follows.

Approach 1: Youth for community stabilization and peace

The engagement of youth in community stabilization through capacity enhancement will increase civic awareness and participation in local planning processes. Potential conflicts at the local level can be significantly minimized by youth-focused awareness raising activities, media engagement and youth driven activities that would purposefully engage local youth for limited but critical periods.

Approach 2: Capacity enhancement of local Fora and networks

Effective, inclusive and equitable participation of the people in local planning process, particularly when it is led by capacitated local fora and networks, can result in a community that is confident and forward looking.

Approach 3: Local dispute resolution through mediation centers

Local mediation process owned by local institutions can effectively reduce local level disputes and contribute to community stabilization.

Approach 4: Capacity enhancement of local government institutions

Swift and quality provision of services by local government institutions can contribute to building confidence of the people in their institutions.

Approach 5: Engage community to meet local infrastructure needs

Intensive external support to meet local infrastructure needs can effectively contribute to engage the local population in their own development thereby also raising their confidence and instilling a sense of recognition.

Approach 6: Empowering women to access their human rights

Potential conflict at the local level can be substantially reduced through support and awareness raising activities among women to enable them to access their human rights and justice, particularly those who have been subjected to violence.

Approach 7: Improved economic opportunities

Increased economic opportunities, through support for local agriculture and skill development, can provide incentives for community members, particularly the youth and the excluded, to remain within the communities and contribute to local governance and development activities.

Narrative description and implementation assessment of the above LPBAs are given in the Section below. The detailed analysis of each approach is carried out in Approach Assessment Sheets and given in Annex D.

3.3   DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL PEACEBUILDING APPROACHES

Approach 1:

Youth for community stabilization and peace: **The engagement of youth in community stabilization through capacity enhancement will increase civic awareness and participation in local planning processes. Potential conflicts at the local level can be significantly minimized by youth-focused awareness raising activities, media engagement and youth driven activities that would purposefully engage local youth for limited but critical periods.**

One peacebuilding program helped to form Youth Mobilization Committees (YMC) representing each ward of the VDC. These committees were given the responsibility of assessing the need-based developmental priorities (such as water supply, school buildings, irrigation canals etc) and forwarding it to the VDC Council to be incorporated in its annual plan. This process mobilized youth to engage in purposeful activities while helping the community to develop their villages. Another program supported formation of Youth Networks (YN) that comprised *dalits* and other marginalized groups as well. These Networks carried out small rehabilitation works with close consultation with community and respective stakeholders (e.g. School Management, VDC Council). Engaging the youth in constructive activities gave them sense of purpose and recognition and helped to divert their attention from potentially destabilizing activities.

Youth were able to motivate the community to contribute voluntarily labor for development activities thus fostering social cohesion. The training received by youth not only enhanced their capacity to lead and speak in public but also helped to bring the voices of the community to the VDC.

The major setback of this approach was the discontinuation of the YMCs after the project phased out, which led to the end of the positive activities that had begun. The YMCs were not recognized by the APM and other governing agencies and were looked on with suspicion by community members (especially the elders from the community). The lack of full time employment within the village resulted in the migration of youth from their villages. The training provided for youth to handle community issues did not reach all the wards of the VDCs, thus limiting a wider impact. Moreover, the one-off support/ training were not effective in addressing the issues that were raised.

Involving youth in developmental activities resulted in the wider participation of the community and had a positive impact on mitigating youth conflict. Focusing on a participatory approach helps to bring the community into the decision making process and can lead to positive impacts in fostering community harmony and stability.

Approach 2

Capacity enhancement of local Fora and networks: Effective, inclusive and equitable participation of the people in local planning processes, particularly when it is led by enabled local Fora and networks, can result in a community that is confident in decision making and aware of its roles in local governance processes.

This approach seeks to mobilize community for their effective role in local governance planning processes through active participation of the locally formed youth and community groups or networks such as Ward Citizen Forum (WCF), Village Citizen Forum (VCF), Women Network (WN) and Youth Mobilization Committee (YMC). A Local Peacebuilding Program imparts skills and tools to these networks in order to strengthen their capacity in reaching out to the community members as well as to be fully aware of the stipulated planning processes and provisions made by the Government in allocation of local level resources. Following participation in training sessions, the network members then approach community members, with particular focus on the marginalized communities, women and the youth, to identify their needs on a priority basis. This process starts from ward level, coordinated by WCF and YMC and then to the VDC level, coordinated by VCF and YMC. At the VDC level, the priorities of the communities are discussed together and an overall list of prioritized investments is developed. This list is displayed publicly and sent to the VDC to be discussed at the VDC Council meeting which finalizes the list of prioritized investments within a VDC.

The approach was noted to have contributed to the development of a number of local youth and community based networks. The networks also included members from dalit and marginalized communities. The network members were then actively meeting the community members and creating awareness at the grassroots level about local government planning processes and bringing the voices of community people into decision making on local level resources. As a result, a number of VDCs had developed a prioritized list of schemes (such as school buildings, drinking water, playground, health posts

etc) as well as some groups such as women networks were able to access VDC funds for group activities.

On the other hand, this approach was not effective in reaching out to the disadvantaged communities. The network members had not been able to create the desired level of awareness among the *dalit*, poor and marginalized communities. In some cases, the strengthened network members were not retained in their own locality (i.e. they migrated in search of jobs) due to inadequate economic opportunities at the local level which this approach was not able to address. Most LPB programs have created new local networks and institutions (such as YMC and WN) which have not received wider local recognition.

The implementation of this approach has resulted in a large segment of the VDC population being aware of resources available at the local government level. When facilitated by the local networks, the villagers have actively participated in the local meetings and discussions on identifying their needs. However, the traditionally marginalised communities and women in particular were still not aware of the locally available resources and were not in a position to influence decisions on how these resources could be used in improving their living conditions.

Proper application of this approach has the potential to address some of the key drivers of conflict, mainly in addressing exclusion and in ensuring that local government resources are equitably distributed to benefit the poor and underprivileged communities.

Approach 3

Local dispute resolution through mediation centers: Local mediation processes owned by local institutions can effectively reduce local level disputes and contribute to community stabilization.

This approach looks to create a community managed local organization that can resolve local disputes before they flare up. The concept of having such mediation centers with easy community access is meant to allow local non-criminal disputes to be resolved locally and to maintain community harmony at the VDC level. Local disputes handled by trusted mediators of the conflicting parties from within the community is expected to resolve the issues more quickly than any other formally established legal and law enforcing institutions. Mediators drawn from the community are more aware of the causes of the conflict and their mediation is more socially obligatory to the conflicting parties. Such mediation process prioritizes on creating understanding between the conflicting parties and creating win-win situations rather than passing legal judgment.

The approach was noted to have contributed to resolving a number of local disputes at the community level. Local people reported feeling more comfortable in accessing the services from the mediation centers than going to police and other legal institutions. Mediation centers in selected VDCs (e.g., Dainiya in Morang) were seen to be involved in local dispute resolution and reported success in solving issues without the involvement of the police. According to MC coordinators the win-win situation created while resolving the issues have satisfied both the conflicting parties as they have not gone for legal recourse in solving the disputes. According to a VDC Secretary in Morang, 12 MCs in Morang district registered 306 disputes of which 291 were resolved amicably, 10 cases remained disputed and 5

were in process *(Bhojraj Bhujel, VDC Secretary, Bhaudaha VDC, Morang,excerpt from Melmilap Kunj, USAID/Pro-public publication, no date).*

The short term training provided to 27 mediators covering all nine wards of the VDC has enhanced the capacity of the mediators in dealing with disputes in a professional way. Inclusive selection of mediators from different ethnic groups has allowed conflicting parties to select mediator who they trust from their communities. Linking the mediation centers with the VDC has supported to sustain the process. The VDCs were continuing to provide the operation cost of Rs. 15,000 per year to the Mediation centers even after the termination of the projects.

On the other hand, having no provision for refresher training to mediators, limited their capacity to deal with more complex forms of disputes. Moreover, due to the absence of incentives, mediators were less enthusiastic to participate in mediation work and in some cases mediators living in distant wards were reluctant to come to mediate, due to the cost incurred in transportation. The mediation centers had no legal status as they were not registered in the district agency. However, parallel mediation centers found in two VDCs in Morang that were formed under a previous program were receiving support from the VDC and were still in existence.

The approach has supported to maintain peace at the local level by resolving disputes on property distribution, family feuds, and local disputes. Immediate resolution of such disputes with community involvement has stopped situations from getting worse, thereby fostering harmony at the local level.

Approach 4

Capacity enhancement of local government institutions: Swift and quality provision of services by local government institutions can contribute to building confidence of the people in their institutions.

This approach aims to enhance the capacity of local government institutions so that they can be more effective in political and economic administration and ensure that local aspirations and priorities are taken into consideration in planning and implementation. Quality participation of the community in local governance processes not only supports to strengthen local government institutions but also develop community confidence over its functioning. The LPB programs have supported to strengthen the capacity of local governance in addressing the communities with special attention to TMC issues and bring them in the mainstream of development. Strengthening of local institutions was necessary to develop awareness about prevalent unequal distribution of local resources and to involve TMCs in decision making processes. The increasing level of community awareness, among youth in particular, has supported in developing more participatory planning process at the VDC level and led to the community becoming more vocal on block grant distribution. As a result, in the last two years, the VDCs have become comparatively more responsive and effective in distributing block grant and delivering services.

There have been no elected representatives in local institutions for a considerable period. This has created a gap between the community and local governance mechanisms. There is a great deal of mistrust between people and the current management of VDC and DDC carried out through a group of

local political party representatives collectively known as All Party Mechanism (APM) working together with government staff (LDO at DDC level and Secretaries at the VDC level).There are often serious accusations of misuse of funds and lack of accountability in the decisions made by the APM This situation has led to an environment of frustration among the public in general.

Capacity development of local government institutions has made VDCs more responsive and effective during the past years and has resulted in increase, by around 30% over the past few years, of the annual numbers of service seekers in VDC. The provision of the Citizen Charter in the VDC has helped to inform the public of VDC services, the documentation that is required and eventually simplify the service provision resulting in reduced service time and costs for the common public.

Participation of youth and marginalized communities in local government institutions is important to develop confidence and trust in the local governance process. It is important that communities, particularly those that are socially and economically vulnerable, are given a role to play in determining the way their village is developed. This can be best achieved through engaging them in decision making process. Participatory and inclusive decision making can assure more equitable distribution of local resources with increased access of the poor and the vulnerable group to this resource to improve their economic wellbeing.

Approach 5

Engage community to meet local infrastructure needs: Intensive external support to meet local infrastructure needs can effectively contribute to engage the local population in constructive purposes as well as raise their confidence and instill the feeling of recognition.

Community driven infrastructure schemes were selected through stakeholder participation that included the community, the VDC Secretary, APM, and the DDC representative. Projects comprised school building, sub-health posts, waiting shelters, and toilet blocks that aim to serve wider community. In one LPB program, the VDC/ government institute contributed 20% of the cost of the project. The involvement of the community in developmental activities during project initiation and implementation has allowed the entire community to work together in building assets in their village or community, thereby increasing harmony among the community members.

 At the same time, this approach has given the local people an opportunity to improve their skills through On the Job training on construction works. Their works are supervised by skilled technicians from the programs. The use of local labor in the development of infrastructure has helped to generate short term employment for the local community. The improved infrastructure, such as a renovated school building, has positive impacts on school enrolment. Rebuilt health posts have helped to increase safety of medicines and consequently the provision of health services to the wider population and investment in water supply schemes have increased the availability of drinking water.

Most importantly, the development of infrastructures as part of the peacebuilding approach has given a visible and strong message to the communities, particularly the deprived communities where these schemes have been targeted, that they are not neglected by the State or the local governments. The

20% and 80% cost sharing modality has worked well and brought private and government sector together working for community. The infrastructure developed in areas where deprived communities are located have given the feeling of recognition and increased the confidence of TMCs. All renovated and new structures are being used and appreciated by the communities.

However, maintenance plans for the rehabilitated infrastructure were not made and the limited grants were insufficient for their maintenance/ rehabilitation.

Infrastructure development in rural areas has been established as a tool to increase confidence of the people and increase co-operation and harmony within the community. An inclusive approach has shown to help the community to unite and work for a common target even with smaller budgets.

Approach 6

Empowering women to access their human rights: **Potential conflict at the local level can be substantially reduced through support and awareness raising activities among women to enable them to access their human rights and justice, particularly those who have been subjected to violence.**

Patriarchal structure, norms, values and tradition has led to women suffering from physical battering and domestic violence. The State has failed in the formulation and implementation of laws related with domestic violence and physical torture. Women are subjected to violence when they protest their rights and are vulnerable as there are no provisions for safe house made available by the State.

One of the peacebuilding programs provides counseling services and safe houses for women victims of conflict and torture. The implementation of this approach has resulted in a large section of the VDC population being aware of women rights and human rights. The most important part of this approach is establishment of psycho-social counseling center. The center has a Counselor with a 6-month training that is followed up with refresher and additional trainings. The Counseling Center attracts a large number of women victims, with around 95% of the total victims in the area visiting the center for counseling. Safe houses provided by the program to women staying outside their families for a number of reasons have helped save a number of lives. Many local youths have shown their interest in the center and have visited it to find out about its activities. The establishment of a Local Management Committee manages the program.

Due to human resource and fund limitations, the center is open only two days a week. This does not allow some cases to be dealt with soon after the incidence which is sometimes very necessary to avoid harmful consequences. This is an area where additional support is needed.

Approach 7:

Improved economic opportunities: **Increased economic opportunities, through support for local agriculture production and skill development, can provide incentives for community members, particularly the youth and the excluded members, to remain within the communities and contribute to local governance processes and development activities.**

This approach looks into one of the most important factors in building peace at the local level, that of unemployment, especially of the youth. A recent survey showed that 46% of 20 to 24 year- olds in Nepal are "highly underutilized" (National Labor Force Survey, 2008). This approach incorporates other key peacebuilding elements, which look to include underprivileged communities and ensure equitable distribution of resources. The approach has been broadly applied in the peacebuilding programs to support the creation of opportunities for the local population that target youth in particular. These interventions have included training programs, linkages with markets or provision of in-kind support such as seeds and pump sets. A broad range of areas (around 40 trades) are covered   such as vegetable and high value cash crop production and marketing, vocational training to impart skills that are in demand (such as plumbing, carpentry, maintenance of mobile sets etc), and entrepreneurship development programs.

Vocational training programs are increasingly inclusive with some programs attracting female participation levels of around 60%, and a similar focus on underprivileged community participation. These programs often have 80-90% of their graduates obtaining employment. Those with agricultural skills and with access to land, have engaged in cash crop production where the annual increase in income levels have more than doubled, thereby attracting more youth into the agriculture sector. Some of the trainees have opened up shops and service centers (such as for electrical wiring) in their own locality.

Some challenges exist in implementing this approach. It is still not possible for this approach to reach out to remote areas of the country where large numbers of youth with poor education and skill base can be found. The trainees with weak financial and social capital are unable to access jobs or attract only low-paid jobs, and the support mechanisms to help them in securing better jobs are weak.

This approach has the potential to impact the success of other peace building approaches. Other approaches often target youth networks to engage in local planning and development activities and depend on these youth staying on in their communities to carry out other activities. However, our study has shown than 70% of program supported youth (of YMC, for example) had left due to lack of economic opportunities locally and those who stayed on only because they had been locally engaged in some form of economic activities.

CHAPTER 4: IMPACT OF THE PEACEBUILDING APPROACHES ON THE DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

4.1   SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The peacebuilding approaches have succeeded in bringing awareness in the communities on inclusive development but it has not reached to the decision making level and consequently the resources have not reached the Traditionally Marginalized Communities.

Fundamental changes in terms of exclusion based on gender, caste and ethnicity in the structure of Nepalese society is critical to wellbeing of the nation. Without including the Traditionally Marginalized Communities (TMCs), peacebuilding in Nepal cannot have a stable foundation. Thus, efforts to secure access of disadvantaged groups, such as women, youth, Dalits and other marginalized castes to local government budgets as well as to link them with local government planning processes, have been a vital component of peacebuilding programs.

The peacebuilding programs evaluated in this study have been able to increase the capacities of TMC's to develop a more accurate understanding of their needs as individuals and as a group. However, when the evaluation team went into to more impoverished areas such as in Bhakhaduwa, Jogidhaha, Chinnamasta VDCs, where Madhesi Dalit communities lived, it was noted that Dalits, women and youth were not aware of issues vital to their ability to participate fully in society, such as the citizenship charter, necessary registrations, and sectoral budget allocations from the VDC (see Annex H).

Prior to the project, TMCs tended not to be aware of the existence of local Forum and networks despite TMC representation in these networks and the forum. After the project ended, it was found that awareness programs carried out through YMC, SM, WCF, and VCF have made the members of various fora more aware of their rights and responsibilities. They were now seen to be capable of approaching the VDCs, some for the very first time, and giving proposals for services such as infrastructure building (road, school, drinking water etc), and allocating budgets for skill development programs for women and other disadvantaged groups.

Dalits, Madhesi Dalits and Ethnic communities were engaged in the identification of strategic locations for the infrastructure projects. A Youth Mobilization Committee (YMC) was formed comprising nine members from each ward which included ethnic, Madhesi and Dalits. In one of the LPB programs , a Project Management Committee (PMC) was formed that included Dalits, Madhesi Dalits and women. At two infrastructure sites, women were heads of the PMC and played a lead role in monitoring the work underway.

Community perceptions on the capability of women, Dalits and TMCs have changed as a result of the inclusion of these groups in YMCs, Ward Citizen Forum (WCFs) and Village Citizen Forum (VCFs), which has served to show that that they can bring positive changes and development in the village. Women, who were previously confined to their houses, have become more vocal about their issues and

rights. Many have become members of community groups such as women networks, WCF, VCF, and YMC and have demonstrated to the community that women, youth and Dalits can also be an active part of development activities.

Since Madhesi Dalit communities were not aware of the existence of local forum, the evaluation team was unable to assess a direct contribution of the program in linking poor local communities with local government authorities. However, their responses pointed to an improvement in some services, such as vital registration which were said to have become faster.

4.2   LACK OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

The peacebuilding approaches have prioritized local resource generation through community mobilization. However, the approaches relied on voluntary contributions which could neither be sustained nor were able to promote economic opportunities at the local level.

The peacebuilding projects, have tried to increase economic opportunities through building/ renovating required infrastructure in various communities. However, as the evaluation team found, most of these projects were carried out using voluntary labor contribution, and hence had a limited direct economic impact on the target group. The evaluation team noted that the creation of economic opportunities for youth and the community was weaker in Saptari and Udayapur Districts.

Lack of economic opportunities amongst the youth in VDCs visited is one of the key factors leading to the widespread migration of youth from villages in search of work in neighboring cities or abroad. In all VDCs visited, the evaluation team found that 70% of youth who were previously YMC members had left their villages in search of work. Those who had replaced the previous YMC member have not received any training and hence were unaware of the roles and functions of the YMC.

The team came across a number of infrastructure projects undertaken by the project. These include the construction of a school building, health post, VDC building, Women Development Center, a compound wall of a VDC building in Buddhanagar, Diania, Majhare, Siswani Badahara and Baijnathpur and other VDCs of Morang district. In order to build/monitor such infrastructure work, PMCs was formed. Out of ten infrastructure projects visited, three were constructed by the PMC and the remaining seven by contractors. Local labor (both skilled and unskilled), was hired thereby creating job opportunities within the area. Furthermore local resources such as bricks, transport facilities were used which also created additional economic opportunities within the area.

4.3   ABSENCE OF PRACTICES OF ADDRESSING LOCAL CONFLICT

Local peacebuilding approaches have sought to develop locally effective and manageable tools, such as Mediation Centers (MC) to address gaps in resolving local disputes and conflicts. These have been largely successful in promoting local harmony by minimizing local disputes.

Field level interviews with communities revealed that many local conflicts arose from issues such as domestic violence, land grabbing and, livestock issues. It was noted that in 13 VDCs of Udayapur and Saptari, the community tried to resolve conflicts internally at first. If unsuccessful, the cases were taken to the VDC, and subsequently to the police. However, where local mediation centers have been established by peacebuilding programs, social mobilizers and YMCs play key roles as mediators. This was particularly the case in Pathargadha VDC of Saptari.

During an evaluation of 5 VDCs in Morang district, it was found that mediation centers have been established to address small local level conflicts. Mediation centers are considered to be effective in addressing local conflicts in the community. However, it was noted by the evaluation team that mediation centers were already in existence that had been set up by a different program. Consequently, there now are two mediation centers in some wards of the VDC. Discussions with social mobilizers of Dainiya and Buddhanagar VDC indicated that the mediation center established by other program was more effective than the one supported by the peacebuilding program. The main reasons attributed for this was the economically self sustaining method in which the other MC was designed. I.e., a fee of Rs.150 was levied on each conflicting party of which a portion was used to remunerate the mediators and the balance used to fund the running costs of the MC. The evaluation team also visited the other mediation center for a comparative evaluation. The team observed that the other mediation center has received more cases (one case per month for peacebuilding program as against eight cases by the other program). Similarly, the other mediation center has been legally registered with the concerned authority while that supported by the peacebuilding program was not yet registered.

Shova Sapkota, Senior Supervisor from Nari Bikash Sangh expressed that the existence of the mediation centre has addressed the problems in the community. However, she felt that it was not effective to have two MCs in one VDC, competing with each other. It is better to empower one and get its services rather than to have two in the same locality.

Similarly, for the purpose of sustainability and ownership, mediation centers have been handed over to the VDC office. In Buddhanagar and Dainiya VDC of Morang district, the VDCs have granted Rs. 15,000 to each of the mediation centers as an Endowment Fund to cover administrative costs.

4.4   UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

The local peacebuilding approaches have been designed to increase the access of women and marginalized groups to community resources through increased awareness and empowerment. However, the distribution of local resources is highly inequitable as the TMCs do not have sufficient influence at the decision making level.

Disparity in the distribution of resources has been one of the key factors that fuels local conflict. Peacebuilding program have tried to address the issue of unequal distribution of resources by linking youth, women, and TMCs to local government planning process.

Peacebuilding programs have supported the formation of various committees at ward and village level such as YMC, WCF, VCF PMC and WN in order to empower excluded groups to raise their voices for their

Women community from the paddy field participated in the FGD.

rights/needs among themselves and with the VDCs. This approach has been effective in bringing in the voices of people within the local networks and committees and has resulted in proposals being placed to the VDC council. In 13 VDCs of Saptari and Udayapur and five VDCs in Morang district, the program supported institutions have been successful in making their VDCs accept their proposal. Women networks are aware of VDC budget allocations and have begun to lobby for these resources through their networks. Few of them have succeeded in obtaining grant from the VDCs to carry out activities for women, *dalits* and youth, for instance, the renovation/construction of community infrastructure such as roads, schools and drinking water supplies. The peacebuilding project in Morang has encouraged appropriate distribution of VDC budget resources by strengthening WN, WCF and VCF.

At the same time, the organization and capacity building of community level groups by the peacebuilding programs have led to initiatives been taken to identify community based projects which have been forwarded to the VDCs for implementation. However, the continuity of program initiatives after the phasing out of the peacebuilding program is weak. For instance, it was observed that a number of YMC and other fora members have left the areas due to lack of economic opportunities. This has raised doubts about the long term continuation of the program interventions on local peacebuilding.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

The drivers of conflict have been central to our evaluation work with the evaluation questions guiding the scope of evaluation. The analysis of the findings based on the drivers of conflict is presented in Chapter 4. The findings below are structured around the drivers of conflict while responding to the evaluation questions.

A. Social inclusion and practices in distribution of resources

Social exclusion results in inequality in the distribution of opportunities and resources. Exclusionary practices are widespread in Nepal, and more so in the rural and underdeveloped regions. The local peacebuilding approaches have been designed to increase the access of women and marginalized groups to community resources through increased awareness and empowerment. Youth and citizen based groups such as Youth Mobilization Committees (YMC), Ward Citizen Forum (WCF), Village Citizen Forum (VCF) etc were constituted by the LPB programs, and trainings were provided to strengthen their capacity to organize, communicate and lead local planning and development processes.

These organizations were found to be active and reached out to the communities in organizing resources for small infrastructure development, holding youth camps on peace and constitution writing and in maintaining social harmony. They also visited communities and households to understand their development priorities and assess resource needs and prioritize them before approaching the VDC Councils for its approval for resource allocation.

However, soon after the completion of the programs, these organizations began to weaken. The youth members started to leave their villages in search of economic opportunities. Those who remained or were added have continued but weakly in the absence of any formal recognition by the VDC or by the local political leadership. The motivation and support needed to penetrate deeper to reach out to the marginalized and poor communities was lacking, and consequently the participation of these groups in decision making for the resources was not effective. While some organized and empowered women groups have secured their share of resources, the overall distribution of resources is highly inequitable. There is growing awareness among the deprived and poor communities that they need to have stronger role in the local governments and that resources should flow more to them, but their own capacity to organize and to assert their role limits them in achieving this objective.

 Some of the findings which reflect these observations are summarized below:

- Organized and strengthened youth and citizen based groups supported by the peacebuilding programs have extensively carried out identification of community based projects and forwarded them to the VDC Councils.

- Mixed results were observed in youth initiated schemes being prioritized by VDC Council with up to 80% of such schemes adopted in Hanuman Nagar VDC of Saptari but none in Katari of Udayapur.

- Women networks were found to be more empowered and aware of the VDC budget allocation for women development, which they now widely access and use.

- The number of women, dalits and other traditionally marginalized people in executive committees of Community based institutions is in average around 50%.

- Rights based citizens fora (such as WCF and VCF) were also widely active at the ward and local level planning processes and worked closely with YMCs. Working closely with the VDC Secretaries, these institutions were seen to encourage people to express views on their resource requirements and to approach collectively to the local political leadership.

- The local peacebuilding approaches, in general, and the youth based approaches in particular were not effective in bringing much needed changes in involving the marginalized communities in the local decision making process.

- Much of the LPB initiatives were not owned by the local political leadership at District and local level. A weak linkage with VDC Secretary and DDC Secretary (i.e. the LDO) was not adequate for the local institutions to own these institutions.

- The marginalized and dalit communities were not effectively empowered and mobilized in strengthening their voices in local decision making processes. While they were included in the committees and fora, their role was not visible and effective. The social mobilization process to reach out to them was weak and ill-designed. Marginalized groups (e.g. In Jogidaha and Bakhadua of Udayapur and Saptari) felt that they still consider VDC services and resources out of their reach

- There was avoidable duplication in creation of local institutions. There are two sets of WCF and VCF in most Wards and Villages as LGCDP/MoLD and LPB programs have both created similar organizations. Similar duplication was also seen in the case of establishing Mediation Centers (MCs).

- Despite limitations, there is increased awareness and trust among the communities on the VDC institutions and available resources. Consequently, VDC have seen more than 30% increase in the visits to VDC for essential services.

- This encouraging progress in accessing local government services and the local political leaders, supported by recently acquired tools and skills (such as public hearing, hoarding boards etc) were seen to promote further engagement of the communities with their VDC institutions and to take themselves closer to the planning processes and decision making levels.

B. Availability of economic opportunities at local level

The local peacebuilding programs reviewed by the team in the districts visited (i.e. Saptari, Udayapur and Morang) did not have activity components to directly support creation of economic opportunities for the local population. This usually means, in the local context, provision of vocations skills, financial or material support to youths to establish employment intensive enterprises or agricultural development programs etc. The peacebuilding programs which supported these activities, such as NFRP and EIG, were not implemented in the visited districts. However, intensive infrastructure development support in

Morang as well as to a lesser extent in Saptari and Udayapur were providing short term employment to local population.

The team found the local youths feel very strongly that economic opportunities were severely lacking. This was reflected by absence of many youths that were originally in the youth organizations. These and other findings noted in the studied districts are summarized below:

- In the absence of economic opportunities locally, the local youths, particularly those from the poor and marginalized communities, were migrating from the villages, taking away the skills that they had acquired from peacebuilding programs. The evaluation team found that around 70% of youths who were previously YMC members had left their villages in search of work.

- Those who have replaced the trained YMC member have not received any training from the leavers or other organizations on the roles and functions of the YMC.

- The program support in renovating or building new infrastructures of local importance (such as renovating school buildings, irrigation canal or building a school compound) were extremely popular and well appreciated by the local population, particularly from temporary employment as well as utility perspectives.

- Women and Dalit/TMC were well represented in User Committees. Two Users Committees in Budhanagar in Morang district were managed by women.

- Qualitative engagement of *dalits* and women was still weak due to poor capacities within these groups. In three infrastructures developed in Morang, women workers were paid less than their male counterparts for similar works.

- Rapidly delivered infrastructures were seen to have increased the confidence level and feeling of recognition among the communities in their own ability to manage resources and deliver results to the communities.

- Employment in infrastructure works with priority to local labors to upgrade/demonstrate their skills and many of them have since been offered higher skilled jobs in the locality.

- As infrastructure works were designed to access 20% external non-program resources, local institutions, mostly VDCs, contributed this amount strengthening the linkage between local government processes and the people's initiatives.

- While youths were at the centre of any initiatives to promote economic opportunities, the youths in the study areas were univocal in expressing attractive economic opportunities at the local level has been the highest priority for the local youths and communities. As a result, youths were less interested in continuing to engage in social-service focused activities such as support in local government planning or awareness creation etc.

- Youths working to promote local planning and fair resource allocation generally resented the local political leaders. They felt that local political leadership representing in the local All Party Mechanisms (APM) were ignoring the politically neutral groups and listening only to youth cadres of their own parties.

- Recognition of youths by the community elders as a force for change is mixed and there is more yearning for such recognition among the youths. In VDCs such as Pathargadha (Saptari), YMC members felt that they have received social recognition. This was not the case in most areas studied.

- With local youths still not able to fully influence the decisions made by the APM on local government resources, the VDC investments have not reflected the priority needs of local youths and poor communities of enhanced local economic opportunities.

C. Strengthening systems, tools and skills for addressing local conflicts

The local peacebuilding programs have developed a number of systems and tools and provided necessary skills to the community representatives to use them. These systems and tools have been designed to minimize conflicts at local level by resolving disputes of local nature through local initiatives (such as local Mediation Centers, MC) or by creating wider awareness through use of different communication media, such as FM Radio broadcasts, public hearing sessions and provision of display boards to disseminate information on Citizen Charters and community prioritized projects. Furthermore, it was important that these tools were useful in bringing the communities, particularly the women, youth and TMCs, closer to the local government processes of decision making on local resources and to their local political leaders so that their sustained engagement in the local government processes is possible.

The evaluation team found that Mediation Centers (MCs) have been particularly popular and useful in reaching out to common people. Majority of local disputes were found to be of localized nature, such a neighbor's goat eating grass or crop of another household or small land forcibly occupied by a neighbor/relative. MCs were a big relief for a family for whom this small but thorny injustice can be addressed locally and fairly with reduced prospect for this being flared up at a community level.

Public hearings, hoarding boards and brochures and posters were widely supported to disseminate information on the roles and responsibilities of local governments and the people. The outcomes of the local planning processes, particularly the schemes identified and prioritized by the community meetings, were displayed at key locations.

These and other findings below summarize the application of systems, tools and skills used in minimizing local conflicts:

- The Mediation Centers are given space and financial support by the VDCs which promoted the ownership of this tool by local government units. Financial contribution included annual allocation of Rs. 15,000 for the MC Endowment Fund.

- One MC in each LPB program VDC in Morang was established. Each MC comprised 27 members trained for 8 days by professionals supported by LPB programs. The training was found to be effective in imparting required skills and was followed by refresher trainings.

- There is growing participation of women and dalit members in the MCs. In most MCs, Dalit participation is around 11%, women 41% and marginalized communities at around 28%.

- Effectiveness of some MCs was reduced due to duplication of efforts by different programs. In Budhanagar and Daiania VDCs of Morang, MCs functioning for the past 7 years were not approached for possible collaboration by new LPBPs which would have made the whole process more effective.

- The MCs formed earlier in Budhanagar and Diania by programs other than currently reviewed have provision to charge Rs. 150 from each conflicting party. They have proved to more resilient and popular than the ones currently reviewed. Older MCs receive around 8 cases a month per MC while the new MCs receive one case a month.

- Public audit / public hearings have been widely practiced, particularly in Morang, as media for the communities to communicate their feelings on local government activities and on their political leaders. Public audits were widespread in Morang (around 98%) but fewer in Saptari and Udayapur. Similarly, 92% of the survey respondents participated in public audit/hearings in Morang but figures for Udayapur and Saptari were just above 20%.

- Citizen charters were found in all 13 VDCs visited by the Evaluation team in the VDC premises and in various strategic locations. However, some quality and ownership issues were associated with such display.

- Public in general have felt that Citizen Charters have helped service seekers to reach to the respective VDCs with well prepared documents minimizing the cost and time investments in accessing services.

- The disadvantaged groups (i.e. Dalits or marginalized communities) in particular were noted to be poorly aware of citizen charters and local government processes in resource allocation and in how they can access their political leaders.

- The citizens who had visited their VDC offices ranged from around 50% (for Saptari and Morang) to 68% for Udayapur. These figures are still small considering the services that people need to receive from VDCs.

5.2   CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 1: Strengthening of community based organizations (e.g. YMC/ VCF/ WCF) and their undertaking of community needs assessment has helped to better understand the community priorities and feed this to the Village Council meetings.

Conclusion 2: Inclusive composition of women and marginalized people in local fora and networks has led to wider awareness on inclusive development and equitable sharing with various ethnicities and fora/networks.

Conclusion 3: The ability and approach of the peacebuilding programs to reach out to weaker segments of the community is weak. The awareness raising programs have not succeeded in reaching out to disadvantaged and vulnerable communities in the same intensity as non-disadvantaged groups.

Conclusion 4: Local communities, particularly the *dalits*, are still unaware of the services, resources and facilities available at the local level and ways to access them. There is no discernible and long term change in the way decisions are made locally with visible participation of the traditionally marginalized groups. As a result, inequality in opportunities and resource sharing is still widespread in the study areas.

Conclusion 5: Strengthening of the youth organizations through trainings on new skills (such as developing organizational and communication skills; local planning processes etc) has increased youth self confidence and enhanced their capacity to undertake local development activities and understand peace building issues (e.g. local conflicts and their drivers, constitution drafting process, federalism etc). Training and orientation in these areas have been very productive.

Conclusion 6: Local youth participation and activism is more pronounced and stable when they are already employed or have a locally based profession.

Conclusion 7: The linkages between local youth/citizen fora and the local government institutions (DDC and VDC) are weak due to absence of formal linkages of the programs with VDC/DDC institutions. As a result, local government institutions and political leadership have not recognized these institutions for long term support.

Conclusion 8: Creation of parallel institutions without sufficient support and legitimacy de-motivates the members of the organizations and adversely impacts their long term commitment.

Conclusion 9: Increased use of community based tools such as public hearing/ public audit, local FM Radios, display boards with Citizen Charters of VDC etc has increased community preparedness and confidence over VDC institutions resulting in increased use of their services.

Conclusion 10: Mediation centers have been successful in resolving local disputes by building consensus among the disputing parties. This tool particularly stands out as having direct and visible impact at the local level.

Conclusion 11: More awareness and increased youth activism at the local level have created pressure at the VDC level for the VDC institutions to perform better and for local political leaders to listen to the youth and marginalized communities. However, the community members, particularly the youth are still limited in their engagement on local government activities due to poor economic opportunities at local level.

5.3   RECOMMENDATIONS

- Program designs need to be more intensive and committed in order to penetrate into the poor and Madhesi Dalit communities. These programs should include activities to support members of these communities in income generation as a priority.

- Employment, income generation or skill development training programs need to be provided to youths so that they don't get frustrated due to poor prospect of finding work in their own villages and also to motivate them to engage in development activities.

- The communities felt that the departure of some peacebuilding programs were abrupt reflecting inadequate preparation for their departure. Projects should *have well a thought through exit strategy* as a part of the program design.

- Partnership with local government, other program partners and communities should be established from the initial stage of program planning for swift and quality provision of services and to develop ownership of the outputs by local government institutions and local political leadership.

- Pre-program surveys should be given priority to avoid duplication of work such as creating parallel institutions that already exist.

- The VDC should be made the owner of its Citizen Charters and hoarding boards displaying community prioritized schemes. This information displayed would be more effective if written in local language and made easily readable by the community.

- There is need to have a third party program monitoring at the central level, DDC and VDC levels, in order to review the progress and impacts on stakeholders accountability, development of ownership and to assess the effectiveness of NGOs services.

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